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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001543

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [MY](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON PEACE AND SECURITY IN  
MINDANAO

REF: A. MANILA 1206  
[B](#). MANILA 1187  
[C](#). MANILA 1285  
[D](#). MANILA 1337

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process Dureza told the Ambassador and DCM May 9 that he expected security on Jolo island, the scene of recent fighting and location of terrorists and U.S. Special Forces, to remain manageable through the May 14 elections, but political violence remained possible. On the peace process with the MILF insurgents of Central Mindanao, Dureza said President Arroyo had postponed decisions on territorial concessions until after elections, since her cabinet was divided. Dureza said the government was working with Malaysia and Saudi Arabia to bring together the leaders of the two main Muslim insurgencies to begin to define how Muslims want to govern an expanded autonomous region. A clear way forward is needed in 2007, Dureza said, to transition to new governing arrangements during President Arroyo's term. End Summary

[1](#)2. (C) Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process Jesus "Jess" Dureza told Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission on May 9 that rogue Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) Commander Habier Malik -- whose attacks on Philippine Armed Forces on Jolo Island beginning April 13 (refs a and b) triggered battles that left at least two soldiers and dozens of MNLF troops dead and displaced tens of thousands of near-by residents -- lacked the capacity to create further major problems on Jolo. Malik remains on the run with little support from other MNLF commanders, and his followers are dispersed, said Dureza. Dureza expressed more concern over the possibility that armed followers of candidates for governor might clash in the election period, but opined that this was manageable. Dureza predicted that Sakur Tan would defeat incumbent Governor Benjamin Loong, who had lost the confidence of local leaders with the beheading of seven kidnapped road workers by the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ref d). MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari remained upbeat about his own candidacy for governor, but Dureza predicted Misuari would lose. Nevertheless, Dureza commented that the government had done the right thing by allowing Misuari to run.

[1](#)3. (C) Asked about the long-expected next round of peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) insurgents in Kuala Lumpur, Dureza said the talks would take place sometime after Philippine elections on May 14. The cabinet security cluster was divided over government negotiator Afable's proposed territorial concessions, and President Arroyo had decided to wait until after elections to define the government's position. Particularly contentious

was the MILF's demand for inclusion all of Sultan Kudurat province, which is predominantly Christian yet historically Muslim and rich in resources. Cabinet deliberations were complicated by an unfortunate leak, which imperiled the electoral campaign of the pro-Administration incumbent Governor, who is a Muslim (ref d). Dureza said the Philippine side would request Malaysia to persuade the MILF to reduce its demands in Sultan Kudurat province.

14. (C) Dureza said the year 2007 was critical for the MILF peace talks. The outlines of the new Muslim political entity must be defined soon enough to preempt scheduled 2008 elections in the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. A transitional council, including MILF, MNLF and all Muslim leaders, could then be appointed in 2008 to define Muslim self-determination, in place of elections. Dureza also expressed concern that, without progress this year, some impatient MILF commanders could shift their support to MNLF commanders willing to fight, undermining the authority of MILF Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim.

15. (C) Dureza reiterated the importance of MNLF Chairman Misuari's and MILF Chairman Murad meeting together and agreeing to participate in a transitional council for the new Muslim political entity. The Philippine government had traditionally sought to divide the Muslims, Dureza observed, but now a more confident government saw the merit in uniting them to achieve comprehensive peace. However, governmental efforts to facilitate a meeting between Misuari and Murad had not succeeded. Dureza said the Philippines was encouraging Malaysia and Saudi Arabia to press for such a meeting in the coming months.

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KENNEY